



NARRATIVES IN MOTION: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF STORYTELLING TECHNIQUES AND CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT IN PIXAR'S RATATOUILLE AND THE GOOD DINOSAUR

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ABSTRACT

This research analyzes the narrative structures and character development in Pixar's *Ratatouille* (2007) and *The Good Dinosaur* (2015) using a qualitative comparative approach. Through narrative design, character progression, and thematic construction, the research highlights how Pixar employs anthropomorphism as a narrative strategy for creating emotional engagement and expressing sophisticated human experiences via non-human characters. *Ratatouille* is a goal-driven story of identity, creativity, and breaking free of societal constraints, played out against the colourful streets of city Paris. *The Good Dinosaur*, on the other hand, is a nature-driven hero's journey with a focus on fear, resilience, and growth set in the sweeping, untrammelled wilds. Such differing contexts influence the films' emotional paradigms and storytelling paths, providing distinctive visual and thematic encounters. Despite their contrasts, both movies create intense audience empathy through visual symbolism, multiple-character development, and emotional depth. Remy, a rat with a culinary fantasy, defies convention and remakes success, while Arlo, a shy dinosaur, undertakes a redemptive odyssey of bravery and self-revelation. Both their stories emphasize the universal quest for belonging, identity, and inner resilience. This research is important to animation studies because it shows how different narrative structures—urban vs. rural, society vs. nature—can be just as effective at constructing emotionally complex narratives. It also supports the thesis that anthropomorphizing animal characters is a strong storytelling device because it allows for greater audience identification and more effective thematic expression. Finally, Pixar's storytelling approach confirms the potential of animated film as an intelligent and culturally relevant form of expression.

KEYWORDS: Pixar, Storytelling, Character arc, Animation Analysis, Ratatouille, The Good Dinosaur

INTRODUCTION

Pixar Animation Studios is renowned for crafting emotionally resonant animated films. Their stories often center on anthropomorphic characters navigating relatable human experiences. This paper analyzes how two distinctly different Pixar films—*Ratatouille* and *The Good Dinosaur*—employ storytelling techniques and character arcs to explore identity, emotion, and resilience. While both films feature non-human protagonists, their narrative strategies differ in tone, setting, and thematic depth.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

1. Emotional Storytelling in Animation (Jenkins, 2006)

Henry Jenkins explores how digital storytelling, particularly in animation, evokes emotional connections through transmedia techniques. He emphasizes the ability of animated films to create complex emotional experiences, not just through dialogue but also through visual metaphors and pacing. Jenkins argues that emotional depth is constructed through narrative worlds where characters grow in believable and symbolic ways, as seen in Pixar's use of anthropomorphism.

2. Semiotics and Symbolism in Animated Films (Wells, 1998)

Paul Wells discusses how semiotics—the study of signs

and symbols—can be applied to understand deeper meanings in animated films. Animated cinema, he argues, communicates abstract themes through symbolic imagery and character design. In both *Ratatouille* and *The Good Dinosaur*, visual symbols such as food and landscapes serve as metaphors for identity, transformation, and emotional development.

3. Narrative Structure and Visual Language (Bordwell & Thompson, 2010)

David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson detail how traditional narrative frameworks adapt in animated contexts. Their work discusses the role of story arcs, causality, and visual storytelling in engaging viewers. Pixar's films often reflect a hybrid structure—merging classic three-act formats with expressive visuals—which allows films like *Ratatouille* and *The Good Dinosaur* to stand out in their narrative complexity and emotional trajectory.

Research Objectives

1. To explore the narrative forms employed in *Ratatouille* and *The Good Dinosaur*.
2. To study the humanization and evolution of animal lead characters in the two films.
3. To study differences in storytelling approach between

Ratatouille and The Good Dinosaur

Research Questions

1. What narrative structures define 'Ratatouille' and 'The Good Dinosaur' respectively?
2. How are the animal protagonists humanized and developed within each movie?
3. What are the principal differences in storytelling between Ratatouille and The Good Dinosaur?

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative comparative methodology to explore storytelling and character development in Pixar's *Ratatouille* and *The Good Dinosaur*. It utilizes a descriptive research design involving scene-by-scene analysis, character progression tracking, and thematic interpretation. Primary data were gathered through repeated film viewings, supported by secondary sources including scholarly articles, reviews, and online content. The population uses purposive sampling to include the narrative structures and main characters of the selected films. Data were analyzed through thematic analysis and visual semiotics. Ethical considerations include proper citation and adherence to academic integrity throughout the research process.

This study conducted a qualitative comparative analysis of Pixar's *Ratatouille* (2007) and *The Good Dinosaur* (2015) through detailed scene-by-scene observation to examine storytelling techniques and character development. In *Ratatouille*, the analysis focused on Remy's transition from an outcast in the sewers to a culinary visionary navigating the human world. Scenes such as his first entry into Gusteau's kitchen illustrated the symbolic leap from marginality to aspiration, with dynamic editing, urban visuals, and character interactions highlighting themes of identity, ambition, and acceptance. Meanwhile, the emotional resonance in *The Good Dinosaur* was evaluated through quiet, visually driven moments like Arlo and Spot's fire-sharing scene, which conveyed grief, bonding, and resilience without dialogue. The study traced Arlo's gradual growth from fear to courage through non-verbal storytelling and expansive natural imagery.

INTERPRETATION

The comparative analysis revealed that while both films utilize anthropomorphism to humanize their protagonists and foster audience empathy, they differ significantly in narrative structure and emotional tone. *Ratatouille* follows a goal-driven narrative shaped by societal ambition and external conflict, whereas *The Good Dinosaur* adopts a journey-based structure centered on personal growth and internal struggle. The contrasting settings—urban Paris versus untamed wilderness—play a critical role in shaping each film's visual and thematic texture. Ultimately, the data analysis confirms Pixar's mastery in adapting storytelling frameworks to explore complex human emotions through non-human characters, underscoring the effectiveness of visual symbolism, silence, and character arcs in animated storytelling.

FINDINGS

This qualitative study analyzed the narrative strategies, character

development, and storytelling style in Pixar's *Ratatouille* (2007) and *The Good Dinosaur* (2015). By close viewing, scene-by-scene deciphering, and theoretical conceptualization based on Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey, Vladimir Propp's Morphology of the Folktale, and Multimodal Discourse Analysis, the research produced valuable findings concerning the three specified research goals.

DISCUSSION

Pixar's storytelling brilliance is its capacity to revisit conventions of storytelling to match various emotional and thematic terrain. The contrast between Remy and Arlo's character journeys lays bare two modes of character development that are distinct yet productive—intellectual and instinctual. Tying the story environment (Parisian kitchen versus prehistoric landscape) to each character's journey, Pixar situates each character's ride in an environment that raises the stakes emotionally. The studio's focus on quality animation and psychological complexity provides for richly textured stories that engage both children and adults.

LIMITATIONS

This study is constrained by scope, only looking at the case of two Pixar movies out of their vast library. The interpretive nature of qualitative understanding can miss counterpoint readings of theme and character. This study also does not have quantitative audience reception data that can confirm claims of emotional effect. Future studies should enlarge the sample size, incorporate diverse audience understandings, and explore cross-cultural understandings of empathy in animation.

CONCLUSION

The comparison of *Ratatouille* and *The Good Dinosaur* confirms Pixar's skill at creating emotionally nuanced narratives through diverse narrative strategies. Whether mapping social identity into a rat with gastronomic aspirations or emotional recuperation through a terrified dinosaur, Pixar uses anthropomorphism, visual metaphor, and robust character design to create empathetic pathways. The research affirms the contention that animation isn't a genre but a medium—one that can express deep human truths with imaginative storytelling. This research highlights the merit of animation studies as a valid field of study and upholds Pixar as a pathblazer in emotionally resonant cinematic storytelling.

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